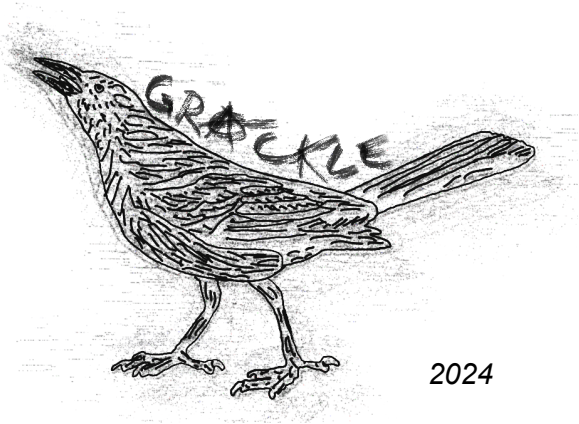
Now, I wonder if I was too harsh. Maybe my better self, a more free self, would have been able to acknowledge the realities both of her trauma & fear of being shot over a cash register, & the horrible act of snitchery she did in service of the carceral system. Or maybe I should have robbed her myself. I don't know, I'm not very good at this whole anarchy thing.

I realize I haven't really answered the questions I started this essay with. That's because I don't want to have final answers to them. Rather than getting lost in the big questions that get raised when you treat "the Revolution" as some kind of eschatological event that is always just around the corner, I want to resist the urge to gather power to myself. I want to instead help people around me to live richer, better lives. I want my imagination to open up to new possibilities. Benjamin Zephaniah said, "Fuck power, let's just take care of each other." That's as good a North Star as I've ever seen.



2024

DISORGANIZED THOUGHTS
ON ANARCHIST ORGANIZING

Benjamin Zephaniah & Alfredo Bonanno's passing have me reflecting a lot on what anarchy means to me. What am I actually trying to do? If a better world is possible, what do I want it to look like?

I think that questions such as, "how will we distribute food on a societal scale under anarchism?" or "how will anarchy train doctors?" misunderstand anarchy as a premise on basically every level. I know anarchy works locally because it has often been the thing that keeps me alive & fed & cared for medically. All the same, the level I have been pondering is anarchy as a global possibility, or even as a global goal. "Under anarchism" is an obvious contradiction but anyway do we - do I - even want everyone in the world to be an anarchist? I think it would be lovely but to see it as the goal is to miss the point..

Maybe that's a shortcoming of my own liberatory imagination but the most "anarchist" revolutions today like the Zapatistas & Rojava are really only "anarchish" & that's fine. The world is much bigger than my tiny conception of how anarchy should look. What would give me the right to travel to Rojava & tell the YPJ to let all of the Daesh sympathizers out of the camps? Or go to a Zapatista territory & criticize their rules against drinking alcohol? Why am I so sure that I have all the answers? Isn't it better to trust that my comrades have reasons for organizing in ways that I would not? Not to say that any action or group is above critique! As Graeber was fond of pointing out, systems of care & domination are often intertwined & sometimes even the same down to roots.

It's not that I think people are fundamentally power seeking. I don't. It's something with cultural variance, but at least in my experiences (especially in workplaces & activism) most people actively avoid power. They accept it only reluctantly, when circumstance forces it on them or the rewards are too great to ignore. Like, you don't want to become a manager but you need full time & benefits so you take the promotion. People who are actively trying to accrue power are usually transparent assholes & nobody likes them. But what is really rare is people who not only avoid increasing their personal clout, but are also willing to oppose others who gather it. What's rarer still is trying to dismantle the very fundamental, psychological structures of power. Even in anarchist organizing I've found it difficult to convince people to use consensus rather than simple majority. Can't blame them - it's asking to engage with a difficult process new to most rather than simply "getting it done" with regards to whatever the actual goal is.

So what's a legitimate objective for me as an anarchist? When world liberation according to my ideological program is unlikely & maybe not even desirable? For me there are a few points by which I can measure success in a project or action:

1. Material improvement for oppressed people. If we fill bellies, it's a win.
2. Autonomy for myself & others. If we are just a little less under someone else's boot, it's a win.
3. Uplifting of a collective good. I'm part of communal wholes (meaning anything from my affinity group to all of reality, contextually) & everyone in them is just as important as me on an individual level. If I can realize that, either in my soul or in meatspace, it's a win.
4. Expansion of liberatory imagination. Even if everything else fails, if I or someone else sees a new possibility then it's a win.
5. Fun. Pleasure & play are legitimate goals in their own right. See #4.
6. Revenge. There's always revenge.

More abstractly, I want to think of success in terms of increasing freedom. It's not a zero sum - my freedom does not end where someone else's nose begins. Sometimes it does, & sometimes somebody needs to get punched. Sometimes that someone is me. Sometimes freedom is realizing that my needs can take a backseat to a collective good. Other times it's insisting that the severity of my need outweighs the collective's. It's building social trust to where we can discuss situations while assuming good faith, where the give & take happens without fear of advantage taking or domination.

I went on a date with someone who had been a bank teller during a robbery. She was robbed by an older black woman, armed with a piece of paper ("but she could have had a gun!"). She later learned the woman was trying to pay her sister's medical bills. My date told me how she rode along with a police detective ("ACAB but I felt a camaraderie with her when she told me she was a lesbian") to identify the suspect who then spent 5 years in prison. My date felt deeply traumatized by the whole experience. I ended the date, telling her as gently as I could that I was entirely on the side of the bank robber & privately thinking that I had just met a monster. The truly terrifying kind that sleeps soundly at night in a comfortable bed with loved ones nearby.